

MANUEL CAMUS AND RAFAEL CAMUS, PETITIONERS, VS. COURT OF AGRARIAN RELATIONS, TIBURCIO HILARIO, ET AL., VICENTE PASCUAL, RUFINO DE LA CRUZ, ET AL., RESPONDENTS.*G.R. No. 18225. June 30, 1964*

Ponente: MAKALINTAL, J.

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Respondents here (with the exception of respondent Court of Agrarian Relations) filed a petition in said Court against Manuel Camus and Rafael Camus, now petitioners before us. It is there alleged that petitioners, owners of a fishpond in the municipality of Sagay, Occidental Negros, engaged respondents as tenants in 1949; that the conditions of their tenancy were that said respondents were to "work, excavate and convert" the fishpond into saltbeds, with petitioners defraying the expenses for that purpose, and that thereafter petitioners and respondents would divide the salt produce between them, share and share alike; that respondents were able to make 485 parcels of saltbeds; and that subsequently they were ejected as tenants, some in 1955, some in 1956 and others in 1957. They therefore prayed for liquidation and accounting of the salt produce from 1949 to 1957 and payment to them of their share, for reinstatement as tenants and for damages and attorney's fees.

Petitioners filed a motion to dismiss on the ground that respondent Court was without jurisdiction over the case, since the same did not involve any question relating to tenancy of agricultural land. The motion was denied, as was the subsequent motion to reconsider the order of denial, whereupon the instant petition for review by certiorari was commenced, with a prayer for preliminary injunction, which we granted to stop further proceedings below in the meantime.

The issue of jurisdiction turns on whether or not the relationship between the parties under the agreement above set forth is one of agricultural tenancy or tenancy of agricultural and within the meaning of the law creating the Court of Agrarian Relations and prescribing the scope of its authority (R. A. No. 1267, as amended by R. A. 1409) Section 1 of this law states the purpose of the creation of said court, namely, "for the enforcement of all laws and regulations governing the relation of capital and labor on all agricultural lands under any system of cultivation." Section 7 confers original and exclusive jurisdiction on the court "to consider, investigate, decide, and settle all questions, matters, controversies or disputes involving all those relationships established by law which determine the varying rights of persons in the cultivation and use of agricultural land where one of the parties work the land."

The land involved here was originally a fishpond, converted into saltbeds. As fishpond it was agricultural in character, devoted to agricultural purposes. Has its conversion into saltbeds changed that character? In other words, has the change in the use of the land worked a transformation in its basic classification, from, agricultural to mineral, considering that salt is by scientific definition a mineral substance? The questions undoubtedly call for a negative answer. Insofar as the process of salt production in this case is concerned the kind of land used as evaporating basin is a matter of indifference. The basin indeed could just as well be a cement or metal

receptacle, or any flat surface where brine or sea water can be let in and allowed to evaporate, leaving the solid salt content. The fact that such receptacle is used as an indispensable accessory to the operation does not change its basic character, any more than it would convert agricultural into mineral land, the latter being, according to the Mining Act (Section 8), land which contains natural deposits of valuable minerals "in sufficient quantity and quality to justify the necessary expenditure to be incurred in extracting and utilizing" them.

Petitioners point out, however, that although the land itself is agricultural salt production is not an agricultural process, that it is not "cultivation" as the term is used in section 7 of Republic Act No. 1267, as amended, since agriculture refers to the culture of viable organic matter on the ground, such as preparing it for the reception of seeds or plants, sowing and planting, rearing and gathering the crops, care of fruit trees and domestic animals. But the same provision in defining the jurisdiction of the Court of Agrarian Relations, speaks not only of "cultivation" but also of "use" of agricultural land "where one of the parties work the land," and includes within such jurisdiction "all those relationships established by law" between said parties. The land involved in the present case is agricultural land the use of which—if not the cultivation—is the tie that binds the parties in tenancy relation.

But whatever doubt there might be from the standpoint of semantics or of word definition the doubt is resolved by the law itself, specifically the Agricultural Tenancy Act (R. A. No. 1199), entitled "An act to govern the relations between landholders and tenants of agricultural lands." Section 46, which prescribes the consideration for the use of land under the leasehold tenancy system (as distinguished from the share tenancy system) classifies lands according to the crops produced thereon, and provides in its subsection (c) that "the consideration for the use of sugar lands, fishponds, saltbeds and of land devoted to the raising of livestock shall be governed by stipulations between the parties." Saltbeds are again mentioned, together with fishponds and land principally planted to permanent fruit trees, in Section 35 of the new Agricultural Reform Code (R. A. 3844) and expressly left to be governed by the former statute, R. A. No. 1199. All this shows the clear intention of Congress to include saltbeds within the purview of the tenancy laws, disputes concerning which come under the jurisdiction of the Court of Agrarian Relations.

The questioned orders of respondent Court are affirmed, the writ of preliminary injunction is dissolved and the case remanded for further proceedings. Costs against petitioners.

Bengzon, C. J., Padilla, Bautista Angelo, Concepcion, Reyes, J. B. L., Paredes, and Regala, JJ., concur.

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